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SUBJECT: U.S. ELECTION WATCH IN THAILAND DRAWS RECORD CROWD

REF: Bangkok 3298

#### Summary

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¶1. Summary: U.S. Mission Thailand directly engaged over 2,000 members of the public through three simultaneous Election Watch events held in Bangkok and Chiang Mai on November 5. Media interest was intense and Post estimates that approximately 25-35 million Thais were reached through the widespread coverage of the three events. Ambassador John hosted Embassy Bangkok's seven-hour Election Watch extravaganza during which 1,800 invited guests, including Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat (see reftel), Bangkok Governor Apirak Kosayothin, key contacts and over 1,000 students, joined in the excitement. The Ambassador gave interviews to all six national television networks, which covered the event live, as well as local cable stations, radio, and major print dailies. Consulate General Chiang Mai held two simultaneous election events, one on Consulate grounds for 80 close contacts and a second broader event held offsite for 130 university students and faculty. These celebrations offered the Thai public, key Mission contacts, and Thai young people an opportunity to witness and get greater insight into this historic and exciting election. End summary.

¶2. Comment: Guest feedback on the U.S. Mission's Election Watch events was resoundingly positive, as was the news coverage. Guests and commentators drew comparisons between America's peaceful and celebratory democratic transition and recent tumultuous events in Bangkok, including clashes between the government and opposition. The election and Election Watch events, which dominated the news on November 5, provided a unique opportunity for us to highlight key policy messages on the importance of democracy. In a Bangkok Post article entitled, "U.S. Election - Some Lessons for Thailand," the Ambassador was quoted as saying, "The rule of law and the Constitution are very important and the most important thing is (that) it's perfectly appropriate that people along opposite sides...disagree about issues and resolve them peacefully." This was a clear underlying theme throughout the day and the Election Watch events an outstanding vehicle to convey this message to Thais. End Comment.

#### Bangkok Election Watch Attracts Record Numbers

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¶3. On November 5, Ambassador Eric John hosted a record crowd at the U.S. Embassy's Bangkok Election Watch 2008, organized by Public Affairs with support from over 80 Embassy volunteers. Around 1,800 guests including government leaders and officials, academics, media, business leaders, diplomats, civil society, students and politicians from across Thailand attended this highly-anticipated election event that featured a wide range of informational activities designed to showcase the U.S. democratic system in action.

¶4. Guests were already lined up to enter the event when the doors opened at 7:00 a.m. and the grand ballroom -- decked out in red, white and blue Americana decor -- was packed as the first vote tallies came trickling in shortly thereafter. Ambassador John opened the event with welcome remarks to a crowded ballroom in which he highlighted the longevity, resilience and tenacity of the U.S.

system of democracy. Thailand's Prime Minister and Bangkok's Governor (and deputy leader of the opposition Democrat Party) both made special appearances at the event to congratulate the United States on a successful election, demonstrating that American democracy in action could even bring Thailand's political adversaries together for the same cause, at least for one day.

#### Continuous "Edutainment"

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¶5. Additional highlights of the Bangkok event included live discussions via satellite with the Voice of America Thai Service, dozens of informative posters designed and produced by Embassy Bangkok's own Information Resource Center (IRC), a mock election, and plenty of photo-ops for guests with cardboard cutouts of the presidential candidates and a live "Uncle Sam." The IRC's "election reference desk," complete with a collection of election-related resources and giveaways, received significant traffic.

¶6. In addition, the American Chamber of Commerce (Amcham) in Thailand and representatives from Democrats Abroad and Republicans Abroad also participated actively in the event manning busy information tables and engaging guests in interactive election-focused activities. (Note: The Chair of Republicans Abroad Thailand remarked to one PA staff member that the event "was a great opportunity to dispel many myths about the Republican Party" for the students. End Note.) With four jumbo screens displaying non-stop coverage of election results and analysis combined with well-timed stage announcements and a special "election music playlist," the room was imbued with excitement throughout the entire seven-hour program.

#### Focus on Youth

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¶7. Embassy Bangkok made a special push to engage youth in its Election Watch event, reaching out to thousands of students in advance of the November 5 party. The effort paid off and more than 1,000 students from across 32 educational institutions in Thailand attended the Bangkok event during which they were actively engaged in a series of specially-designed interactive activities, including election-related quizzes, a digital video conference with students at four American Corners (Khon Kaen, Pattani, Yala, and Nakhon Si Thammarat), an "info-scamper hunt," and special election briefings by senior Embassy officers. Guests also enjoyed watching dynamic home videos made by Thai AFS students currently in the United States, in which they interviewed host family and friends for their views on this historic election.

#### Lights, Camera, Democracy in Action!

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¶8. Bangkok's Election Watch 2008 attracted every one of Thailand's six national television stations, all of whom reported live throughout the day from the event. Thai cable and international Bangkok-based news agencies, including TNN (TrueVision), The Nation Channel, NHK, NPR and VOA also did reporting from the venue. Five national daily papers (Naew Na, Daily News, Krungthep Thurakit and the English-language Bangkok Post and The Nation) sent reporters and photographers. More than 100 press passes were distributed to the media.

¶9. Broadcast media coverage began in advance of the program with the IO granting a pre-event interview the evening before the party. Event day coverage began at 7:00 a.m. local time and continued non-stop until 1:15 p.m. when the Ambassador concluded his final, 30 minute interview with local cable operator TNN. The Ambassador, as well as senior Embassy officers, gave several dozen interviews to the assembled media, including many that were broadcast live from the ballroom. The Ambassador granted interviews to each television network and a handful of print outlets in attendance, fielding questions on a wide range of issues including: implications of the election outcome on U.S.-Thai relations, free trade, and the global financial crisis. The DCM answered questions about what an Obama presidency would mean for America and the world; the Commercial, Economic and Political Counselors discussed trade and political issues respectively; and the IO explained why U.S. embassies around the world were hosting election watch events.

¶10. Over 30 clips totaling more than 200 minutes of total airtime were broadcast from the Election Watch event throughout the day, and ranged from 30-second live spots to 20-minute features that included interviews, in-depth analyses from local political experts, and reactions from both the Thai and American public. (Note: Several local Thai broadcast outlets sent reporters to the United States to provide on-the-ground coverage of the elections. With the help of the Foreign Press Center, the Embassy assisted three separate teams of television reporters from Channel 3, Channel 9, and TPBS in reporting from the United States. End Note.) Post estimates that approximately 20-25 million Thais viewers saw at least one report about Election Watch 2008, and several million more heard coverage on Radio Thailand (estimated listenership of 12 million nationwide).

¶11. Print media coverage was also widespread. Combined circulation numbers for the newspapers is more than six million readers. The day after the election, every national paper mentioned the Election Watch party in their reporting on the U.S. election results. "Citizen journalists" and bloggers were also present, including The Nation senior editor Kavi Chongkittavorn who, with his handheld video recorder, captured several key moments of the event for his blogspot, including the first interview of the day with Ambassador John. Student journalists from Thammasat University also joined their professional colleagues in lining up to interview the Ambassador and others.

¶12. An online news summary of coverage from the Bangkok Election Watch Event is available on OpenNet at:  
[Http://bangkok.state.gov/content/pdweb/internal/news/2008/elections08/index.htm](http://bangkok.state.gov/content/pdweb/internal/news/2008/elections08/index.htm).

#### CG Chiang Mai Brings the Celebration to the North

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¶13. Not to be left out of the fun, Consulate General Chiang Mai held two simultaneous Election Watch events for Mission contacts and friends in Northern Thailand. First, there was an Election Watch event hosted at the Consulate for approximately 80 Thai, Burmese, and American contacts. Prominent guests included the Vice Governor, Mayor, Chairman of the Election Commission of Thailand's (ECT) Chiang Mai provincial office, and Commanding General of the Royal Thai Army 33rd Military Circle. Several electronic and print journalists were also in attendance. NBT aired two slots of its coverage of the event on its national news broadcast. The six-minute piece included an interview with Consul General Morrow on the U.S. presidential electoral process. Coverage also included commentary from the provincial ECT Chairman. Radio MCOT and Channel 7 also conducted interviews with the Consul General from the event for later broadcast.

¶14. ConGen Chiang Mai hosted a second event at Payap University the morning of Election Day for university students in the Chiang Mai area. More than 130 students, faculty, and staff from Chiang Mai University, Payap University, and Far Eastern University attended, as well as some American students currently on exchange programs in Thailand. The event featured a panel debate, mock election, trivia contests, and a live performance of American patriotic music by visiting Oklahoma violinist Kyle Dillingham.

¶15. Special kudos to IIP, GPS Manila, IBB/VOA, the Diplomatic Pouch and Mail Division for going above and beyond the call in support of Mission Thailand's Election Watch events.

JOHN